

## Police Tackle Prostitutes in Victoria

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[Police tackle prostitutes in Victoria](#) [Our Community](#) Undercover police tackle prostitutes o-n the move

Victoria officers posing as sex-trade workers make arrests north of downtown, in Rock Bay  
Jeff Bell

[Times Colonist](#)

Sunday, November 14, 2004

Victoria police have launched an undercover operation to tackle the spread of prostitution to the Rock Bay area, between Bay Street and Gorge Road East.

Sgt. Todd Wellman says police believed it was time to take action in Rock Bay, o-n the edge of the Burnside Gorge district, where prostitutes moved about a year ago from the more heavily enforced southern stretches of Government Street.

The project by the department's targeted policing division has focused o-n men trying to solicit services from sex-trade workers, says Const. Rick Anthony. With female officers posing as prostitutes, four arrests were made in a two-hour period during a late-October weekend.

The aim is to send a message that laws against soliciting prostitutes will be enforced, he says. "That is something that we're going to do regularly and randomly."

"I still think that there needs to be work done by police and other social agencies to address the issue, because it's still affecting both businesses and residents in that area," Wellman says.

Part of the goal is to protect women in the prostitution trade, Anthony says.

"We're concerned for their safety, they're out there and they're vulnerable," he says.

Wellman says the project can also help police get a better idea of the number of prostitutes around Rock Bay, and establish effective communication with them.

Victoria Coun. Dean Fortin, executive director of the Burnside Gorge Community Association, says the prostitution issue will be o-n the agenda Monday when his group holds its monthly meeting.

Jody Paterson of the [Prostitutes Empowerment Education and Resource Society](#) will be a speaker at the meeting, set for 7 p.m. at Burnside community school.

"Burnside Gorge is definitely a working-class neighbourhood, so they have a lot of empathy for the struggles of sex-trade workers," Fortin says.

"So rather than get up in arms, they decided to look at innovative ways to address the issue.

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"Frankly, I'm proud of the neighbourhood and the community for that approach. It comes from a compassionate attitude."

That does not mean the appearance of the "stroll" to the area is without issues, Fortin says.

"It has been a concern of the neighbours and businesses in there, obviously. There's a level of concern when you come home to find certain activities of the trade taking place o-n your doorstep," he says.

The movement of prostitution to the Rock Bay area is just o-ne of the activities that has been displaced from downtown to surrounding neighbourhoods, through various enforcement measures, Fortin says.

For example, he cites some movement of drug activity to Fernwood.

Wellman echoes the need for a considered approach to the prostitution issue. The police department already has an officer acting as a liaison with the people working the streets, he says.

"Our intention is about reducing the amount of harm that results from the sex trade being out in the public."

Conflict with regular neighbourhood activities also has to be addressed, Wellman says.

"The conflict between business owners and the sex-trade workers plying their trade comes during the day.

"The actual conflict is reduced as night falls, when the businesses close. What we're trying to target first is the conflict," he says.

"If we can work out some agreements between the business owners and prostitutes, whatever that might be, to reduce the amount of conflict, then that's a first step."

The basic issues involved are common to any city that has sex-trade activity o-n the streets, Wellman says.

"We hear from the residents and we hear from the businesses, and we need to take care of everyone's concerns as well as the sex-trade workers.

"They've got issues, too, around safety."

Wellman says he would like to see discussions go beyond the area affected and deal with the problems in a general way.

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"I think it's really important that we discuss as a city and as a capital region and as a society, how we are going to deal with prostitution and the sex trade," he says

Paterson says her [group](#) has an o-n-going program in the Rock Bay area.

"We have outreach o-n that stroll three night a week," she says.

"We'd love to expand it, we're looking for money to expand it."

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